

BANNED BOOKS

Banned Books

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BANNED BOOKS

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Banned books/ challenged books are defined as “books that are challenged with the best intentions to protect others, frequently children, from difficult ideas and information.” (ALA, 2016) Banning books infringes upon the American Library Association Intellectual Freedom (ALA, 2006). The ALA Intellectual Freedom consists of the Library Bill of Rights and First Amendment, and Censorship (ALA, 2006). Banning books is censoring communities (ALA, 2016). ALA explains that the top three reasons why material is challenged or banned are because the material is considered sexually explicit, offensive language, and unsuited to any age (ALA, 2016). The ALA Library Bill of Rights is a set of rules on how library staff should behave (ALA, 2016). In this Bill of Rights, bill number five explains that a person’s right is not to be denied because of origin, age, or background. (ALA, 2006) This means that it is not a library’s responsibility to monitor what books young patrons are checking out, whether the books are age-appropriate, or not. Libraries are not allowed to censor information because it infringes on the first amendment. (ALA, 2016)

A focus group was conducted to see the opinion of patrons on banned books in general and how a library can satisfy patrons who want books banned and patrons who do not. Banned Books and Censorship is an important subject to talk about with patrons because they are the ones who decide when a book is purchased or banned from the library. There are other reasons why a book might be pulled out from circulation, such as because patrons were not checking out the book. Libraries have to do this to make room for books that the community will use. Weeding books out is very different from banning books. Banned books/ challenged books present censorship and intellectual freedom issues that affect the community.

BANNED BOOKS

Method

Procedure

One focus group was conducted, which lasted 12 minutes. The group moderator was a graduate student in the Master of Management in Library and Information Science program at USC.

Participants

A total of 4 participants—1 male and three females—took part in the study. Participants ranged in age from 34 to 48 years. Participants were all working professionals, including a teacher, social worker, medical researcher, and paralegal. Participants were of Hispanic and Caucasian ethnicity. All participants are avid readers and use library services quite often.

Focus Group

The focus group discussion consisted of two main questions. Does banning books go against the American Library Association Intellectual Freedom? How can the library satisfy patrons who want a book banned and patrons who want the book to stay? The first part focused on whether the participants thought that banning books goes against Intellectual Freedom. An example question was, “Have you read any of the books mentioned in the top 10 most challenged books of 2020? If so, do you agree why these books are on the list?” The second part focused on how libraries can satisfy all patrons. An example question was, “How can the library please both patrons, the ones who want the book banned and the ones who do not?” The moderator guide can be seen in Appendix.

BANNED BOOKS

Findings

The participants in this study are avid readers who use both digital and physical books. They are also avid patrons of libraries from their respective cities. Participants unanimously stated that banning books goes against ALA Intellectual Freedom. They also have read most of the books presented in ALA's top 10 most challenged books of 2020 (ALA, 2016). Participants also suggested that libraries create a separate space where these banned books are showcased if libraries want to please both patrons, those who want books banned and those who do not.

The participants agreed that banning books goes against ALA's Intellectual Freedom. Participants noticed that books that are constantly on the banned books list are from authors that are a part of particular communities. For example, some authors on the banned books list are native American, African American, and a part of the LGBTQ+ community. Participants suggested that the authors are being targeted by the communities they belong to, which is why they end up on the list year after year. Participants stated that banning books is censoring the community, which goes against what ALA stands for.

The participants selected for this study have happened to read most of the books on ALA's top 10 most challenged books of 2020. This might have made them partial to not agreeing with the Censorship of these books listed. Some of the reasons why participants disagreed with the books listed are that one author talks about his personal experience as a native American. His books tend to always be on the banned list because he does discuss topics in great detail. Rather he exposes all the suffrage he endured. Participants seemed to think that because this native American author is always on the banned books list, certain people do not want his voice heard. Another participant suggested that one of the books on the banned books list be required to read

BANNED BOOKS

in schools instead of being banned from libraries. This book talks about the racism issues that are faced in this day and age. The book is targeted at young adults making it an easy read for young adults.

Participants suggested that the only way to keep both parties, those who do not want books banned and those who do, happy is to create a separate section with a sign explicitly stating that these books are a part of the banned book list. Some participants even suggested that libraries put curtains in front of the banned books like old video rental stores had for explicit content. Participants agreed that libraries must stand on what they believe in and provide information for all. Participants agreed that libraries should continue to perform as they are since some participants already have a separate banned books section in their city library. Participants agreed that for the library to make all patrons happy is to identify the banned books so patrons can read at their own risk.

Participants may have been biased towards their opinions on banned books because they have read the books on the list and enjoyed them. Participants are also enrolled in an ALA-accredited program which means they are aware of the policies that ALA believes. This might have swayed them to agree that banning books and censorship conflicts with what ALA stands for. Overall, participants seemed to decide on the same answers. For example, when asked “How often do you read?” unanimously, they answered “Daily.” Another question participants answered unanimously is “What genre of books interest you?”, their answer was “non-fiction and almost everything.” Participants answered every question asked during the focus group. Even though they were informed at the beginning of the focus group that they could skip it if they felt uncomfortable answering any question. Participants overall are aware of the censorship

BANNED BOOKS

issues that banning books come with. Participants are also aware of the Intellectual Freedom rights ALA stands for.

Discussion

The results of this focus group were that participants believed that banning books causes Censorship, and that goes against the ALA Intellectual Freedom. Participants also stated that they suggest libraries have a special shelf with banned books and labeled so patrons can read at their own risk. The focus group results were not surprising, considering that the participants are enrolled in an ALA-accredited program. ALA stands for intellectual freedom, and that means that if one is enrolled in one of their programs, then one is aware of the policies they support. Participants also might have been biased on disagreeing with banning books because they enjoyed most of the books on the list. This means that they would not want a book they enjoyed to be banned because they found the book informational and or entertaining. Participants stand for intellectual freedom for all.

Two issues wrong with this focus group were that not enough follow-up questions were asked, and there was not enough time to delve deeper into the topic. If there were another opportunity to redo this focus group, follow-up questions would be added to ensure that the moderator gets enough information out of the participants. Such follow-up questions include “Why did you enjoy the book that is on the banned books list?” “Would you as a parent let your child read the books on the list?” “What age group would you recommend read the books on the list?”. The other issue with this focus group was that there was a limited time which meant that questions had to be asked quickly to ensure that all participants are given a chance to speak their minds. If there was a redo on the focus group, the time limit should be anywhere from thirty

BANNED BOOKS

minutes to one hour. It could be possible to do the focus group in twenty minutes; however, twelve minutes did not allow the participants to delve deeper into the topic and analyze each book on the list.

BANNED BOOKS

References

American Library Association. (2016, October 25). Banned book FAQ.
<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks/banned-books-qa>

American Library Association. (2006, June 30). Library bill of rights.
<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill>

BANNED BOOKS

Appendix

Moderator Guide: Banned books*Jande Barrera****Problem:*** Why are books banned? What makes them so wrong?***Goal:*** How can the library satisfy patrons who want a book banned and patrons who want the book to stay?**Intro& Setup**

Hello everyone, my name is Jande, and we are going to be discussing banned books today. Before we get started, I do want to inform everyone that this will only take twelve minutes of your time. If for any reason, you cannot stay for the twelve minutes, please let me know, and we can reschedule. There isn't going to be anything you have to install on your computer for this focus group. I will just be asking questions. If you don't feel comfortable answering the questions at any time, feel free to let me know that you don't want to answer.

Banned books are books that have been removed from certain libraries because the community has found them offensive or inappropriate. The issue with this is how offensive does a book have to be to get banned. Libraries serve the public and their needs, but how far is too far? Does banning books conflict with what the American Library Association stands for?

The participants for this focus group have been randomly selected from a public library database. This database takes patrons' information from previous surveys they have filed out and are in agreement for this focus group.

Background questions

How often do you read?

Do you read on an electronic device or paperback?

Are you subscribed to any reading platforms? If so, which ones?

Do you or have you participated in a book club? If so, which ones?

Do you take reading suggestions from celebrity book clubs? If so, which ones?

I have a list of the [top 10 most challenged books of 2020](#).

Have you read any of the books mentioned?

What are your opinions on the books mentioned?

Do you agree on why these books are on the list?

BANNED BOOKS

Probe

What genre of books interests you?

Do Sci-Fi books interest you?

What other books interest you that you buy?

Wrap- Up

Do you agree with libraries that have banned books? If so, why?

How can the library please both patrons who want the book banned and those who do not?

Do you think that banning books goes against the [ALA Code of Ethics](#)?

Exit

Thank you all for your participation! I would like to verify everyone's emails. You can say it out loud or write it in the chat. In your email, you will find a gift card to Amazon for \$15. Once again, thank you for your time you are dismissed.